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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: I first give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Sumiko Iwao, Chairperson of the delegation of Japan.

Mrs. Iwao (Japan): It is an honour to address this special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". These meetings are of the utmost significance for both women and men the world over. On behalf of the Japanese Government, I would like to commend those who have contributed so much to the preparations for this session, including all the non-governmental organizations.

In responding to the changing socio-economic situation, and with a view to making the twenty-first century truly peaceful and prosperous, it is imperative for us to build a gender-equal society in which women and men can fully exercise their individuality and abilities. We must act to achieve both *de jure* and de facto gender equality. Our efforts should be guided by the need to ensure the empowerment of women and respect for the rights of women, and to demonstrate a strong political will and actions based on partnership.

The empowerment of women plays a central role in the achievement of gender equality. In Japan, the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society, enacted in June 1999, stipulates positive actions. As part of our efforts towards gender mainstreaming, the Japanese Government is promoting the collection of gender-disaggregated data and the quantitative assessment of unpaid work, and has begun to develop a methodology for gender-based monitoring and evaluation of government policies.

The involvement of women in the decision-making process and in political activities is especially important for their empowerment. Since the Beijing Conference, many Japanese women have been elected to national and regional legislative bodies, and this year, for the first time, women were elected governors in two prefectures. We welcome these developments, which have opened new horizons for women's political empowerment in Japan.

For economic empowerment to be achieved, support for women's equal participation in economic activities is vital. The Japanese Government has been promoting measures to guarantee equal opportunities and treatment for women and men in employment, as well as reinforcing vocational training and supporting entrepreneurial activities by women. In rural areas, we are providing support for women's participation in the management of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. In order to deal with Japan's declining birth rate and

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ageing society, we are promoting an environment that will make possible a balance between life inside and outside the family, while both women and men assume roles in caring for children and the elderly.

Japan, as the top official development assistance donor for nine consecutive years, attaches particular importance to addressing poverty and all other issues relating to the protection of women's dignity and livelihoods through the empowerment of women. We will continue to support women in developing countries by including a gender perspective in the humanitarian and development assistance process and placing emphasis on women's education, health, and participation in socio-economic activities.

Japan has recently decided to provide, within the international framework, a 100 per cent reduction, not only in official development assistance debt, but also in non-official development assistance debt, and to contribute an additional amount of up to $200 million to the Debt Reduction Fund of the World Bank. We hope that the developing countries will make effective use of such debt relief for poverty reduction.

Women's empowerment through education and the overcoming of gender-stereotyped ideas is a long-term challenge. Japan will continue to provide lifelong learning with a gender-equality perspective to promote changes in individual consciousness.

True gender equality cannot be achieved without respect for women's rights. Violence against women poses a serious threat to the women of the world, and the need to strengthen our efforts is widely recognized. Japan will continue its efforts to eradicate violence against and sexual harassment of women by taking measures to prevent such actions and to protect victims, as well as by enforcing existing laws, conducting surveys and enacting further appropriate legislation. We will endeavour to ensure reproductive rights and health throughout a women's life span by providing health services appropriate to every stage of life.

We attach great importance to the adoption of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which will contribute to the well-being of children. In Japan, the Law for Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Protecting Children was enacted in November last year, and action is being taken to enforce it. As a further manifestation of our commitment to the eradication of the sexual exploitation of children, Japan will host the Second World Congress Against Commercial and Other Forms of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama in December 2001, in cooperation with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking in Children for Sexual Purposes).

The Government's strong political will and action, based on partnership, are essential in achieving gender equality. Thus, in accordance with the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society, the Japanese Government will formulate the Basic Plan for Gender Equality within the year 2000 and actively implement it through the national machinery, which will be greatly reinforced in January of next year. In this regard, the Japanese Government will continue to attach particular importance to partnership with non-governmental organizations.

As a result of ongoing globalization and progress in information technology, our daily lives and social systems are undergoing a period of major change. Increasing communication of ideas between people is bringing about new thinking and values not wedded to the past. Ultimately, individuals are the main actors in society, and it is they who change society. Thus, the present time offers an ideal opportunity to correct gender inequality, a problem of long standing. The realization of a gender-equal society is significant in the context of promoting the human-centred approach, as articulated in the Millennium Report of the Secretary-General. It is our strong hope that this special session, along with the Millennium Summit, will be a major milestone in the ongoing effort to improve the status of women. For its part, Japan pledges to contribute to successful discussions of the issue that this session is set to address and to promote gender equality worldwide.

The President: I next give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Zinatun Nesa Talukdar, State Minister for Women's and Children's Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mrs. Talukdar (Bangladesh): Five years back, in Beijing, we committed ourselves to a global agenda to achieve the goals of equality, peace and development for women. Today, we take stock of how far we have been successful in achieving these goals. I am aware

there is a time limit for speakers, so I will only highlight a few important issues.

We in Bangladesh continue to be inspired by the noble vision of the Father of our Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for women's advancement and empowerment. We have made sincere and all-out efforts to keep the commitments we made in Beijing. Following the Conference, a National Policy for Advancement of Women was adopted in Bangladesh to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Other institutional mechanisms, such as the National Council for Women's Development, the Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, the Women's Development Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, the Women in Development (WID) Focal Points Mechanism and a District Coordination Committee were also established. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs was strengthened and designated as the focal point to coordinate our efforts. A Women in Development component has been introduced for gender mainstreaming in the national development process, addressing the feminization of poverty and making our women more self-reliant. Through the personal commitment of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Ashrayon (home for homeless) programme and Old Age Pension for vulnerable women have been introduced. In addition, the Vulnerable Group Development Programme for five million housewives, and other innovative programmes, such as micro-credit schemes, have proved successful.

Realizing the importance of the education of women, we have introduced free primary education, Food for Education and special stipends for girls. These measures have contributed to increasing girls' literacy and addressing the high drop-out rate. The female literacy rate has increased from 34.2 to 49.5 percent from 1995 to 2000.

Similar emphasis has been placed on health. The Government has approved a comprehensive health policy under the Health and Population Sector Programme; it has integrated health and family welfare services, with special focus on vulnerable women and children, and this has been successful. Other major programmes include "Women Friendly Hospital", Emergency Obstetric Care and Upgrading Mother and Child Care. These have had an important impact on the maternal mortality rate; the rate per 1,000 live births has come down from 4.5 to 3 from 1996 to 1998.

Although much remains to be done to enhance the participation of women in politics, we have made progress. In Bangladesh, both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are women. At present, we have 11 per cent women's representation in the Parliament. At the local elections held in 1997, 12,828 women candidates were elected.

Despite continuous efforts to combat violence against women, this remains a problem. The Ministry of Women's and Children Affairs, along with other relevant agencies, has undertaken a multisectoral project to establish "one-stop" crisis centres. The present Government, under the able leadership and guidance of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has enacted new laws to address women's human rights. The adoption of the Prevention of Women's and Children's Repression Act 2000 in January this year will act as a strong base for protecting women's human rights and eliminating violence.

We recognize the potential of our girl child. The Government is fully committed to improving the condition of children, with special focus on the girl child. The National Plan of Action for Children has been adopted, with specific programmes identified for this purpose.

While primary responsibility is placed on national Governments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the international community, the United Nations system and other international organizations, as well as civil society, must complement national and global efforts for women's empowerment. The United Nations system needs to do more in a coordinated manner to provide support to government efforts, with particular attention to the least developed countries.

At this special session, Bangladesh renews the commitments it made in Beijing. We would like to carry back important lessons for further actions and initiatives. We pledge ourselves to achieving gender equality and to making the world a better place for women in the new millennium.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women in Australia.

Ms. Newman (Australia): Five years ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Australia joined with some 189 Member States to affirm our commitment to women. This forum provides a unique opportunity for us to learn from and build on one another's experiences since that time and to renew our efforts to address the challenges that remain.

I am honoured to be here today, as the Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women and leading the Australian delegation, to reflect on progress since Beijing and to join in working together to further advance opportunities for women throughout the world.

The Beijing Platform for Action was a rallying point for action for women's equality in all spheres. The Australian Government has worked hard to give practical effect to the Beijing principles and policy recommendations and has developed a powerful agenda for empowering women, firmly based on respect for women's equality and opportunities.

Our record of achievement stands as a testament to this. Twenty-five per cent of Australia's federal parliamentarians are women, nearly double the international average, and women occupy 31 per cent of positions on federal government boards. More women than men complete the final years of secondary education and enter university. Last year, women outnumbered men in undergraduate medical education courses for the very first time. Women are sharing in Australia's sound economic performance, benefiting from reforms to taxation, family assistance, support for those in need and more flexible retirement savings.

There are more women in paid work than ever before — a record high of 65 per cent of working-age women were in the paid workforce as of March this year. Women's unemployment is at its lowest level in 10 years and the gender gap in wages is at a record low of 15 per cent. Around 35 per cent of small business operators are women and the number of women in apprenticeships and traineeships has grown dramatically. From 1996 to 1999, there was an increase of almost 150 per cent, from 34,000 in 1996 to over 83,000 in 1999.

The number of child-care places increased from 269,000 in 1995 to a record high of 430,000 last year. There has been a decrease in the number of women who have died from breast cancer over the past two years. There is greater community awareness and less tolerance of violence against women than in the past. In this respect, the ban on guns was highly significant.

The Australian Government remains firmly committed to improving opportunities and choice for women. An effective government agenda to promote the status of women relies on good governance, fiscal responsibility and the involvement of all sectors of society — public, private and civil. Within this context, the Government is committed to a robust legal and institutional framework to protect women against discrimination and, through both targeted and mainstream policies, to provide practical support for women in paid and unpaid work. The Government's strategies include major economic reforms to improve the well-being of all Australians; educational partnerships across all levels of government and the business and community sectors to address social issues; and a strong focus on preventive strategies to tackle problems at their source.

Since 1996, Australia has introduced far-reaching economic reforms that are providing greater financial security for women. Women — whether they are single workers bringing up families or in retirement — all benefit from this dynamic economic environment. Australian women are benefiting from deregulation of the financial system, a stronger monetary policy framework, low inflation, low interest rates, better workplace relations and — from 1 July this year — a whole new taxation system. Women are benefiting from Australia's new workplace relations legislation, which enables employers and employees to sit down together to tailor flexible working arrangements to suit their needs. Women are now able to build family-friendly arrangements into their working conditions at the enterprise level. Reforms to superannuation are helping more women to plan for a secure retirement and to reduce the number of older women living in poverty.

The Government is also actively supporting employers to adopt better equal employment opportunity strategies, with an emphasis on education, facilitation and practical advice. Training programmes have been set up to help women re-enter the workforce, including familiarization with new information technologies. There are more women in leadership and more educational programmes to increase women's awareness of the political system. The new parenting payment, coupled with new and substantial tax cuts for women with young children, provides greater financial

independence, as well as recognition of women's valuable unpaid work in the home.

The spirit of cooperation so evident at Beijing recognized that all actors must work together if women's equality is to become a reality. Governments alone cannot deliver equality for women. Australia has introduced a powerful new social agenda founded on a social coalition. The Australian Government has taken the lead in building collaborative links with business and community groups, where each partner contributes its strengths and expertise to address social issues. The Australian approach emphasizes prevention as well as cure. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, introduced earlier this year, will support women in balancing work and family commitments and strengthen the communities in which they live by investing in community capacity-building at the local level.

Women in rural communities are benefiting from the delivery of health services specifically for rural women and more research into women's health needs.

Australia has undertaken far-reaching reforms to combat violence against women. The Government has introduced historic national gun controls and a national gun buy-back programme, to which I referred earlier. There has been a national campaign to prevent and address domestic violence, backed by the personal support of the Prime Minister, which emphasizes the need for new cooperative approaches focused on early intervention, testing and sharing new approaches and altering the attitudes and the behaviour of perpetrators. In 1998, Australia played a leading role in the development of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and helped ensure that sexual violence abuses such as rape, sexual slavery and enforced prostitution were included in the definition of war crimes.

Australia believes very much in harnessing the skills and talents of all members of our society if we are to build a better future. But we still have some way to go before women truly achieve equality.

The Government recognizes that Australia's extensive cultural diversity requires specialized measures to meet the concerns of women from these backgrounds and has introduced a range of initiatives to promote a harmonious Australia.

It is vital that Governments maintain their efforts to fight discrimination and harmful social attitudes so that women can reach their full potential.

Australia commends the valuable work that has already been done by Governments and other key actors around the world to empower women. I hope that the Beijing +5 political declaration and outcome document will contribute to an empowering agenda for women. Political commitment, partnerships across all actors and innovative "leading-edge" practices are powerful ingredients for empowering women.

In this regard, Australia hopes its own experience may be of interest and value to colleagues at this critical point five years after the Beijing Conference. We see this as a unique and important opportunity to share experiences and to move forward together.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Margareta Winberg, Minister for Gender Equality of Sweden.

Ms. Winberg (Sweden): In addition to what was stated by the Minister of Portugal on behalf of the European Union this morning, I would like to add the following.

The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action was a great achievement, but it has taken us only part of the way towards gender equality. This morning the Secretary-General demonstrated very clearly the present unequal situation we have in the world.

Let me also mention the unacceptable fact that, five years after Beijing, a recent analysis of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has demonstrated that gender accounts only for some 3 per cent of UNDP core expenditures.

Another alarming fact is that 25 years after the first United Nations Conference on women, only 10 to 12 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women. The male structure persists.

The Nordic Governments and countries continue to be the exceptions. The Swedish Government, for example, has 11 female ministers out of 20, and women constitute 43 per cent of all parliamentarians. We have, however, recently been joined by South Africa, where firm actions by women in political parties have resulted in their obtaining a third of all seats in their Parliament. This shows that fundamental changes are possible,

provided there is political will and political commitment.

Now we all must ask ourselves if there is the political will to change in our countries and in the United Nations. The answer must be yes, because that is necessary for the full implementation of the actions enumerated in the Beijing Platform, and the United Nations must be in the forefront, setting normative targets and achieving the envisioned goals. The statement given by the Secretary-General this morning must be followed by action.

A key issue to this end is to ensure reproductive rights and services for women and men — in particular adolescents — which is a strategic part of our own policy for health development. It is extremely important for young people of both sexes to have access to relevant information and education, which should be given to them privately and confidentially, without the presence of their parents. In Sweden this has enabled adolescents to handle their sexuality in a responsible way, and the result has been fewer teen-age mothers and extremely good reproductive health. Information and education is also a precondition for combating HIV/AIDS.

Men's violence against women is a violation of women's rights and the worst expression of male dominance. It must be condemned and punished wherever it takes place, be it in public or in private. A broad range of measures are needed for an efficient struggle against gender-based violence in all its brutal forms: domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation and so-called honour killings — shame killings, as the Secretary-General said this morning. It is unacceptable that the life of a woman should be seen as less valuable than that of a man. It is our obligation to provide adequate support for the survivors of violence and to combat that violence. We need to develop methods for the treatment of men, but also methods for preventive work, and we must break the culture of silence that prevails among men.

In Sweden, thousands of men are networking to combat male violence against women. They are brave enough to speak up, not only to protest violence committed against women, but also to protest gender-based discrimination in general.

So far work for gender equality has focused far too little on the role of men. The Nordic Ministers would like to share some of the experiences we have gained in this area. I would therefore like to invite all participants to our seminar on "Men and Gender Equality" tomorrow at 3 p.m.

Without the active participation of men in the work for equality, we cannot reach our goal of creating equal societies. I therefore propose that in the near future we arrange an international conference on men and masculinity and on how men can cooperate with women and help us attain the goals set for this session: the promotion of gender equality, development and peace.

The President: I call on Mrs. Cristian Munduate, Minister of the Secretariat for Social Welfare of the Presidency of Guatemala.

Mrs. Munduate (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Five years ago Guatemala endorsed a set of guidelines derived from the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. The commitment to mainstreaming the gender perspective in public policies received renewed momentum from the conclusion of the Peace Agreements that brought to an end a conflict in my country that had lasted for almost four decades. This momentum was strengthened and revitalized by President Alfonso Portillo when he assumed office. His platform of government places great emphasis on issues relating generally to equity in general and to equity and equal opportunities for women in particular.

We cannot but be deeply committed to development and equity, considering that of the almost 11 million inhabitants of Guatemala 50.7 per cent are women, and approximately 70 per cent of the total population lives in poverty. Economic and social disparities in the country are particularly shocking with respect to girls and women, especially indigenous women living in rural areas. Deficiencies exist in the access of girls to the educational system. Women's illiteracy rate is 45 per cent, a situation that is particularly acute in indigenous communities. The maternal mortality rate is still at 190 out of 100,000 live births. Employment opportunities for women continue to be concentrated in the service, agricultural, manufacturing and commercial sectors. And although the participation of women in public life and in professional and entrepreneurial activities has increased, it is still very far from the desired level and from what is provided for in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Thus, in his inaugural speech, delivered on 14 January 2000, President Portillo highlighted his interest in energizing and supporting the development of Guatemalan women. Only two weeks ago a step of paramount importance was taken in the implementation of his presidential agenda with the establishment of the Secretariat for Women under the Presidency of the Republic. This office will coordinate State actions to mainstream public policies for the development of women and will function as the Government focal point for maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the rest of civil society.

Similarly, President Portillo's Government has established a series of goals and policies relating to women in the spheres of total health, illiteracy reduction, access to quality primary education, diversified training, employment and generation of income. With respect to the total health of women, we subscribe to the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action as regards reproductive health, above all with respect to the right to information and the provision of services ensuring respect for freedom of choice.

Our commitment on all these issues goes beyond the creation of institutions. The objective of the Government of Guatemala for the next four years is to bring about an improvement in the standard and quality of life of girls and women in Guatemala.

Furthermore, the Peace Agreements, and particularly the Agreement on social and economic aspects and agrarian situation, set down concrete provisions that facilitate initiatives for the integral development of Guatemalan women and girls. These domestic efforts, and the commitments undertaken at the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as those enshrined in the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, have resulted in specific actions that contribute to strengthening the national agenda in the sphere of women's rights.

A significant advance has been the creation of the Women's Forum, a pluralistic body that follows up on the implementation of policies and programmes in favour of women that are linked to the Peace Agreements. In the same spirit, the Agency for the Defence of the Indigenous Woman was created. It is part of the Presidential Commission coordinating the policy of the Executive Branch in the area of human rights. The creation of this body is an unprecedented development in Guatemala, inasmuch as it institutionalizes an agency to monitor the observance of the rights of the indigenous woman, who has historically been the object of discrimination and social exclusion.

At the legislative level, the law to further the dignity and the integral promotion of women was enacted. It takes into account the claims of Mayan women and the consistent content of legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Belém do Pará Convention, as well as political instruments, such as the Platform for Action produced by the Fourth World Conference on Women. Additional legislation is envisaged to fulfil government objectives regarding women and development.

The commitment, endeavour and contribution of Guatemalan civil society, and particularly the various ideas put forward by the women's movement, have taken on concrete expression in the proposal for public action entitled National Policy for the Promotion and Development of Guatemalan Women/Plan for Equality of Opportunities. This proposal will be looked into by the Secretariat for Women of the Presidency of the Republic.

In summary, the Government of Guatemala has shown its strong commitment to peace, democracy and development, within a framework of tolerance, respect, equity and social inclusion. This is the context of its concern to promote equitable participation for women in all walks of national life. Before this United Nations forum we reaffirm our commitment to support the consolidation of the aforementioned bodies, and we trust that the international community will continue to cooperate with us in the full implementation of these undertakings.

The President: I call on Mrs. Lourdes María Rodríguez de Flores, Secretary of the Family of El Salvador.

Mrs. Rodríguez de Flores (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people and the Government of El Salvador, I would like to present a fraternal and heartfelt greeting to you, Mr. President, and to all the representatives present.

When the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, my country, El Salvador, was just emerging from a bloody 12-year war that

caused tremendous social deterioration, ruined the national economy and irreversibly divided the population.

The 1992 Acuerdos de Paz posed the challenge of building a new society with better opportunities for all Salvadorans. In the face of distinct hostility, various groups put their energy into changing the structure of our social relationships, creating understanding that was more cooperative and less conflictual. Among them were groups of women who led the way to urgent change with a view to improving coexistence and enhancing quality of life; they gradually gained a higher level of participation for women as agents of change and active generators of social capital.

At the beginning of our process of consolidating peace and democracy, women and children were, socially, the most disadvantaged groups. The level of education among rural women was below third-grade level, and the illiteracy rate was greater than 23 per cent. El Salvador led, and continues to lead, the list of Latin American countries with high numbers of teenaged mothers, which poses a threat to the future because of the irresponsibility of fathers and because of disinformation.

Because of such significant facts, and because of a desire to overcome them and the relevance of the principles of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, El Salvador has guaranteed that all those guidelines would be followed in a permanent and sustained manner.

Our first great achievement was to institutionalize efforts towards equal opportunity and rights for women with the 1996 creation of the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development in the context of a national approach to achieving permanent and sustained implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference. The Institute is the national body that guides policy on women and coordinates activities by public and private organizations in keeping with that policy. The Institute coordinates the efforts and experiences of many non-governmental women's organizations which for years have been working in many spheres for women and children. Hence, it has strengthened the areas for participation and joint efforts by the Government and civil society.

In 1996, after an intensive process of broad civil participation, we formulated our national women's policy and its plan of action. When I return home it is expected that the Council of Ministers will adopt the policy's operating plan for 2000 to 2004, in the context of the government programme known as the New Alliance.

I wish now to mention a small number of other achievements that constitute real innovations and that strengthen the holistic development of women. The first is the ratification of the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, which is enabling us to open the way to updating our national legal framework and to carry out awareness and training campaigns.

The second is the formulation and implementation, since 1995, of a programme to improve family relations; coordinated by an inter-institutional committee, this includes a system of services for victims of domestic violence.

Third is the 1996 adoption of a law against domestic violence, which includes mechanisms to prevent, punish and eradicate violence in family relationships.

The fourth is the 1998 creation of a new penal code that protects the constitutional rights of individuals, and covering crimes of abortion, prostitution, rape, sexual aggression, sexual harassment, non-fulfilment of responsibility for economic assistance, and domestic violence.

The fifth achievement is the revision of article 1 of our constitution to recognize that a person is a human being from the moment of conception.

Women's activities to constantly improve quality of life have been reflected, *inter alia*, in two basic achievements in the areas of health and of education. In the health sphere, we have formulated and promulgated standards for care of adolescents and for victims of domestic violence, family planning and reproductive health. It has also been very important to mainstream gender into the training of all health-care professionals.

There has been thorough reform in education, which began in 1989; this has incorporated gender perspectives into the national curriculum and has ensured the publication of educational materials free of sexual stereotypes. The reform process has stressed women's access to formal and informal education to ease their entry into non-traditional jobs and to

eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in school.

Let me speak briefly of some of the challenges that will shape our activities in the near future. We shall be formulating a national plan to monitor and prevent gender-based violence which, through integration at the national, sectoral and municipal levels, will create an effective system for monitoring, awareness and prevention.

We shall improve methods for raising awareness about domestic violence in line with legal norms for the benefit of women.

We shall continue moving forward with the review of laws from a gender perspective, with the assistance of a national legal commission: even though many forms of legal discrimination have been eliminated, women in El Salvador still face discrimination in the way the law is applied.

We shall continue to promote activities that help women gain access to decision-making circles, in both business and the political sphere, because we do not consider that the progress that has been made in some areas is sufficient.

Changes for women are at the heart of modern-day change. As a public servant, but above all as a Salvadoran and Latin American woman, I affirm my uncompromising determination to continue, within our capabilities and in full consonance with reality, to contribute to the achievement of this task to which we are all committed.

Yet it is not my own personal commitment or that of any individual in this Hall that will bring about the successful completion of the task we are discussing at this session. Rather, it will be the organized confluence of all the determination and conviction that can be expected of women worldwide, whose joint efforts will determine the future of our societies, that can make such great dreams and hopes come true.

The present we create is the future we shall have.

The President: I call next on Her Excellency Ms. Khunying Supatra Masdit, Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand.

Ms. Masdit (Thailand): May I, at the outset, congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this special session. My congratulations also go to the other elected members of the Bureau. On behalf of the Thai delegation, I also wish to profoundly thank all concerned for their dedication to the preparations leading to this milestone Assembly. At this special session, I am delighted to see that a great number of colleagues from non-governmental organization sectors are part of their Governments' delegations. This forged partnership between Governments and non-governmental organizations, at this mid-decade review of the Beijing Platform for Action, will lay a solid base for member countries to further renew their commitments made in Beijing and to reaffirm accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action.

Thailand has made substantial progress in its implementation of the Beijing commitments since 1995. We have been giving mindful attention to all areas of concern as addressed in the Platform for Action, setting priorities on the basis of the urgency of problems and of people's necessities. Those areas of concern have been tailored to advance the three interconnected goals of the Beijing Conference: equality, development and peace. Thailand has done much in recent years to enhance women's participation in public affairs, especially at the decision- and policy-making levels. Untiring efforts have been made to increase the proportion of women in politics as candidates and advocates, as well as voters. Our aspiration is to prove to society how women's participation can help transform politics and ensure good governance. Women will make a difference in society through their valuable contribution and partnership with men. Thailand strongly encourages women to rise to the challenge of political reform and ameliorating governance. As the year 2000 happens to be the year of elections at all levels in our country, women's political empowerment lies at the heart of our duties.

At the same time, the involvement and participation of women in economic development has been given no less attention. In Thailand's case, we have seen women's most valuable participation in small and medium enterprises. They have become major contributors to this sector of the economy. Thus, we pledge to continue to carry on our earnest support of women in the economic arena.

I must say that the key word to describe Thailand's endeavours in this decade would be "empowerment" The empowerment of women in all spheres of life is, in fact, one of the main goals of our

social policy. In order to reach this goal, we have emphasized not only the women themselves but also their community. Empowerment of the community focuses on strengthening community capabilities to develop self-reliance. The main thrust of the efforts is promoting participation and allowing members of communities to play shared and active roles in planning and implementing, and in solving their own problems. Women, who normally constitute more than half of the community, will be mobilized to foster sustainable development and peace in society through their own voices and deeds.

I am, in fact, very proud to further inform the Assembly that the review of our community empowerment programme in the past two years has shown significant progress. It is gratifying to note that women's groups have displayed such remarkable competence in working for their own interests, which also benefits their communities as a whole. The success of those women is perhaps the most powerful demonstration of how capable women are. These examples have convinced my Government that we must strive to encourage women in their roles as main actors and leaders of community empowerment.

As we continue to promote the advancement of women at the dawn of the new millennium, Thailand is aware that we must be persistent in performing our arduous task of solving the various problems facing our women. Thailand has devoted tremendous time and diligence to resolving certain social issues, such as violence against women, trafficking in women and problems relating to the girl child and to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The issue of combating violence against women ranks high in the country's social policy priorities. The Thai Government has declared November of every year as the month for campaigning against violence against women. With the cooperation of various governmental and non-governmental agencies, as well as of civil society, we are working hard to raise public awareness of this problem. The Thai Government conducts activities all year round to combat violence. We have been putting much emphasis on the elimination of this form of violence, as we wholeheartedly believe that such violence is a cruel form of violation of human rights as well as of women's rights.

Thailand has come a long way in terms of our commitment to the promotion of women's rights and their advancement. Through time, we have learned that one great and urgent task still to be tackled in society is to mainstream gender perspectives into policies and programmes in all sectors. The national mechanism and the national focal point for gender equality have been set up, with responsibility for providing technical support on mainstreaming to concerned agencies. Capacity-building workshops for gender awareness and gender sensitivity training programmes have been organized regularly. The aim is to assist and familiarize planners and programme executives with gender tools, such as gender analysis, gender statistics and gender indicators. This is to enable agencies to identify the differential impact of all policies on women and men so that appropriate measures can be devised to achieve gender equality.

A core curriculum will also be developed to institutionalize gender mainstreaming into the routine work of those departments and agencies. With such integrated measures, it is anticipated that gender issues will be moved to the top of the national agenda and be recognized by all sectors of society.

In conclusion, Thailand wishes to express its full support for the endorsement of the Political Declaration at this forum. We are certain that the Declaration will serve as an important instrument to ensure further monitoring of the progress made after Beijing. We also reiterate our determination to continue our implementation of the Platform, consistent with further action and initiatives to be agreed upon at this juncture. In so doing, we underscore the fact that all efforts cannot be undertaken by any party alone. Collaborations between governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations and civil society, as well as regional and international cooperation, are integral to our accomplishments. Such coordinated efforts will indeed serve as the basis for our common cause towards gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Marie Josée Jacobs, Minister for the Advancement of Women of Luxembourg.

Mrs. Jacobs (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to congratulate you in guiding our efforts to work for agreement. We offer you our very best wishes.

First of all, I would like to say that Luxembourg fully supports the statement made by the representative

of Portugal, speaking on behalf of the European Union, of which we are a member.

In Luxembourg, the Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women have, starting back in 1995, provided guidelines for us for policies to enhance the status of women and gender equality. We attach very great importance to the Convention. Luxembourg was one of the first to sign the additional Protocol, and we are preparing to ratify it.

The Beijing concept was development and peace. Right now, Luxembourg contributes 0.7 per cent of its gross national product to official development assistance. This percentage will be increased to 1 per cent in 2004. Our country regularly contributes to the efforts of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The 2000 Plan of Action and the plan to implement the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration involve all ministries and civil society. This is our strategy. We are implementing it by creating a legislative framework and by proposing accompanying measures.

In 1997 our Parliament adopted a law making a criminal offence of revisionism and other actions based on illegal discrimination. This law penalizes, *inter alia*, certain types of discriminatory behaviour based on gender or sexual orientation. It states that any national association that has legal personality may, upon agreement from the Ministry of Justice, exercise rights enjoyed by the parties during a civil action. This law is an important step forward, because it will be of great assistance in combating outmoded thinking that is now deemed unacceptable.

A second legislative measure was to designate a male or female delegate responsible for overseeing equality in the private sector. The law on the implementation of the national plan promoting employment provides for the elaboration of a plan for equal employment as obligatory in negotiating collective agreements. Before the implementation of these draft positive actions, to which this law has now given a legal basis, they will be submitted for the views of the gender equality delegates. This framework law opens up access to apprenticeship to persons over 18 years in age and allows women who have devoted years to the education of their children to resume professional training. Parental leave of six months has been introduced for the father and the mother, is non-transferable, with a guarantee of re-employment and a one-time benefit paid by the State.

I am particularly happy to announce the adoption by the Parliament of a law overseeing protection against sexual harassment in the workplace. This law deals with sexual harassment not only by a colleague but also by a client or a supplier. The burden of proof is shared between the victim and the perpetrator. All these measures seek to reduce segregation between men and women in the labour market, and in particular to increase jobs for women. Specific professional training measures have been adopted to train women in new technologies.

Combating social exclusion and violence, neither of which spare women in a country with a high standard of living, commands my full attention. A multidisciplinary working group of male and female representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations has been set up on the initiative of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women. It seeks to coordinate the work of various professional bodies to help the victims of violence. A shelter for young girls was opened, as was a clinic for prostitutes.

In 1999, our Parliament adopted a law to strengthen steps against the trade in human beings and against the sexual exploitation of children, as well as against sex tourism.

In 2000, the women in my country barely account for 20 per cent of those taking political decisions. I do think that the interests of half the population can only be taken into account if this figure represents a rate close to or equal to women's representation in the population.

Luxembourg agreed to the statement entitled "Women, Power and Development", adopted by the Francophonie Conference of Women that took place on 4 and 5 February 2000 in Luxembourg. With the aim of guaranteeing shared, full and active citizenship to women in the decision-making areas, in education and training, in health and the economy, and in peacekeeping, the 55 countries of the Francophonie organization adopted a twofold approach: change and evolution in the roles and responsibilities of women and men leading to a new partnership which will, I

hope, be gender-equal; and systematically mainstreaming all gender policies.

Looking to the future, I would refer to the following priorities: first, implementing our national Plan of Action for employment, not yet completed, with all of its measures to benefit women. We will strengthen our accompanying strategy first and foremost by organizing equal groupings for unions and for management. At the next redrafting of the general status of the employee, our Government will seek to establish an equal structure in our civil service. As yet, the State has not managed to be a pace-setter in this area, as I had announced in Beijing, and I regret this fact.

Secondly, the evolution of women's participation in decision-making will be given my special attention. I am in favour of establishing binding measures for women, particularly when nominating people to electoral slates, even if the coalition agreement between the parties in the Government does not provide for a measure of this kind.

Thirdly, regarding action to combat violence against women, we are preparing a law making it possible to evict any perpetrator of violence from the conjugal home.

Finally, we will be giving heightened attention to changing roles traditionally attributed to women and men. The question of gender equality is a matter that concerns women and men equally.

Luxembourg has developed a pedagogical method that can be applied to teaching and training that takes into account the different type of socialization received by women and men and enables them to develop all of their potential individually. We will see to it that gender teaching is mainstreamed into the curricula of the teaching staff and the vocational guidance staff, as well as that of social workers and law enforcement officers.

It is very important for me that this question of the role of women and men be discussed at this special session. With the participation of men in advancing gender equality, we will be strengthening development in our societies and peace throughout the world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister for External Relations of Angola.

Mr. de Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is an honour and a source of personal satisfaction for me to address this special session dedicated to women.

I should like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on behalf of my Government and on my own behalf, for the wise and able manner in which you have led the efforts of the General Assembly. Angola concurs with the statements made by African representatives who spoke earlier, addressing concerns and achievements in our region related to the problems that mostly afflict women.

In the countries of our region, women play a fundamental social role in the production of goods and services and in the education of new generations. At the same time, women are also the most affected by the distortions in the distribution of national wealth. Despite the fact that we recognize the important role played by women in society, they continue to be under-represented in the centres of political decision-making. These areas are still controlled by men who generally have more time for speech-making than for looking after the children.

In our countries, while it is true that we do not abide fully by the principle that all women and men are equal before the law, it is no less true that our Governments do not completely disregard the need to assign women a very important role in the decision-making processes in our societies. Some of our countries are showing their commitment to the building of democracies with deeds, rather than merely by invoking the freedoms and rights of women. In the Republic of Angola, for instance, 16 per cent of the deputies to Parliament are women, while in government they represent 13 per cent of the administration. Women are represented in the army. They are chief executive officers of companies, hospitals and schools. This is a small step forward, but the Government is committed, in an environment of peace and social stability, to doing more in order to achieve a better representation of women in economic, political and social fields.

This special session should devote particular attention to the situation of women in Africa. On that continent, the proliferation of armed conflicts, natural disasters and infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, have accelerated the decay of the social and human fabric and compromised the economic

development of a majority of its countries. Despite its potential wealth, our continent continues to show the lowest rates of human development in the world. Public investment in the social area is insufficient. In the implementation of social development programmes, Governments are struggling with political instability, the burden of external debt and the weakness of their respective economies.

The developed countries and the international financial institutions have the moral and political obligation to assist Africa in facing and overcoming these challenges. The spate of brutal and incomprehensible conflicts ravaging Africa represents a serious obstacle to the implementation of either the Beijing Platform for Action or any other measure and strategy that may be adopted in support of women. Women are the main victims of these calamities, representing the majority of internally displaced people and refugees forced to live off international charity.

Angola, for example, has high maternal mortality rates due to deficient sanitary conditions arising from the destruction of the greater part of the infrastructure by war and the lack of human and material resources. The war has also given rise to the rapid crowding of urban areas and the weakening of the family unit — factors that are the root cause of an increase in poverty and prostitution.

My Government is seriously concerned about this situation and, through the Ministry of Family and Women's Affairs, is seeking immediate solutions in partnership with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. The programme to resettle the displaced and refugees and to reintroduce them to productive activities and the microcredit programme designed to alleviate poverty among women represent some of the measures taken by the Government. These efforts have already begun to produce positive results by contributing to the development of small businesses and the creation of jobs.

The United Nations and each of the States represented here can do something to put an end to the war that has spread to various countries in our continent. We believe that, if there is political will, it will be possible to completely isolate the warmongers, cut off their supply sources and prosecute them judicially. In Angola, the Government is determined and deeply engaged in the search for a lasting solution to the internal conflict, which is visiting tragic consequences upon the population, and upon women in particular.

It is important to recognize that discrimination against women is a result, on the one hand, of historical and cultural factors and, on the other, of ineffectual policies and programmes at the national, regional and global levels to better guarantee women's rights. This special session of the General Assembly offers us a great opportunity to evaluate these policies and to seek solutions that correspond to the objectives of the Beijing Platform. We are aware that, since the last women's world summit, some achievements have been registered in the recognition and practical reaffirmation of women's rights. However, the current situation of women in the world indicates that much more remains to be done.

How can we speak of promoting women's rights when more than half of the world's female population is affected by poverty and misery? Poverty has become most acute in developing countries as a result of structural adjustment policies and some development strategies that marginalize women from the most dynamic productive sectors. How can we aspire to more active participation by women in the exercise of political power and in public life in general when they continue to be the sector of the population most afflicted by illiteracy, low levels of schooling and, consequently, unemployment?

The urgent reversal of this trend is a fundamental prerequisite to guaranteeing women's participation in socio-economic life and in the exercise of their civil and political rights. To this end, it is necessary that the programmes and strategies designed to promote and defend women's rights be more concrete and precise and enjoy the necessary financial support of the international community within the framework of public assistance for development. In this context, my Government supports the principle that at least 0.7 per cent of the gross domestic product of developed countries should be channelled to public assistance for development.

The Political Declaration to be adopted at the end of this session should reflect this commitment, in conjunction with the engagement by all Members of the United Nations to support the Beijing Platform and the Nairobi Strategies.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the work done by the Preparatory Committee for this special

session, and particularly to that of its Chairperson, Ms. Christine Kapalata. We are convinced that thanks to this work, the objectives of this great event will be achieved.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Paik Kyung-nam, Chairperson of the Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs.

Ms. Paik (Republic of Korea): I am deeply honoured to be with leaders from around the world today to reaffirm the commitment articulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to forge further initiatives for the enhancement of the status of women in the twenty-first century.

Since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, most countries now include a gender approach in nearly all sectors. There have also been profound changes in gender stereotypes and in negative attitudes towards women and girls in many countries.

Despite the substantial progress of the last five years, however, many persistent obstacles to gender equality remain. My delegation believes that this special session should be an occasion to demonstrate our determination to overcome those difficulties. We hope that a concrete and action-oriented outcome document will be adopted at this session.

Since the Beijing Conference, globalization has had a tremendous influence on the status and the rights of women. The dynamic effect and extent of globalization have contributed to the advancement of women and promoted gender equality.

In other contexts, however, the uneven distribution of globalization's benefits has driven an even deeper wedge between rich and poor. For its part, the Government of the Republic of Korea has taken advantage of this crisis to strengthen policies for women. Embracing the spirit of Beijing, it has initiated free vocational training for women, provided livelihood assistance for unemployed female heads of household and created new jobs for women. In order to protect women workers, it established a special channel to report cases of dismissal based on gender discrimination. My country has staged an impressive economic comeback, while locking in important reforms along the way.

My Government also initiated the "Internet Education for One Million Housewives" programme, as well as the five-year plan for "Women's Human Resource Development for an Information-Intensive Society". Government support has likewise been provided through the Act on Assistance to Women Entrepreneurs, which has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of women who have started enterprises in the information and communication technologies sector.

Armed conflicts have also hampered progress in the area of the protection of women's rights. My delegation believes that we cannot adequately protect women's rights in the absence of peace. We hope that this special session will generate momentum for the greater participation of women during the entire peace process, from the pre-conflict stage to post-conflict reconciliation.

As the Assembly is aware, from 12 to 14 June 2000 in Pyongyang, a North-South summit meeting will be held for the first time since the division of the Korean Peninsula half a century ago. We believe that this meeting will constitute a historic turning point towards reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas. Women play a critical and active role in every step towards peace, and we, the Korean women, will do all we can to play a constructive part in this process.

My Government has also placed special emphasis on eliminating domestic violence against women. A Prevention of Domestic Violence Protection Act and a special Act on the Punishment of Domestic Violence have been enacted. By far, however, the most significant achievement of the Government's efforts is the heightened social awareness that domestic violence is no longer just a domestic problem, but a problem that must be addressed by society as a whole.

Strong political will is a prerequisite for the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. For this will to translate into meaningful action, however, women must achieve empowerment in all sectors.

In this respect, we are quite pleased that many women were elected to our National Assembly in last April's general election. Civil groups and non-governmental organizations focusing on women's issues played a visible role in gender mainstreaming during that election. In addition, the Korean Government has striven to promote policies for the empowerment of women. The establishment of the Ministry of Women this year will greatly expand their

participation in the decision-making process in all sectors.

To facilitate the common goals of women all over the world, we face an uphill struggle in the years to come. Let us take the next step by fully implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. For its part, the Republic of Korea will make every effort to accelerate this important process. Let us make a new century for our women.

The President: I wish to commend the representative of the Republic of Korea. She has set the record for perfect time management.

I call on Ms. Andrea Willi, Minister for Family Affairs and Equality between Men and Women of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Willi (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein's membership in the United Nations and our involvement in the Organization's work on issues of equality between men and women have in the past played a catalytic role for the advancement of women's rights in Liechtenstein. This trend has continued very strongly since the Fourth World Conference. It is a great pleasure for me to take this opportunity to present to this important gathering a brief outline of these efforts over the past five years.

In the beginning of 1997 the Liechtenstein Government submitted a report to Parliament, in which it concluded that the necessary legislation for full equality between men and women was in place. As in other countries, however, it was also noted that there was a continuing gap between *de jure* and de facto equality. In order to promote and accelerate equality between men and women, the Government adopted a set of measures aimed at promoting and accelerating full equality in practice. These measures were designed in the light of the contents of the Beijing Platform for Action and thus for implementation of the Platform at the national level in Liechtenstein.

While Liechtenstein subscribes to the principle of the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at both the national and international levels, it was necessary to identify certain priority areas in which action was particularly needed, such as women in the workplace. Government measures included the adoption of the Equality Act in 1998, which ensures the full equality of women and men in the workplace, and measures to combat violence against women and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, including a campaign against violence in 1997 and proposed legislation on the right to protection from domestic violence.

A set of measures was adopted to enable women to pursue family and professional lives in parallel, and several campaigns were conducted to raise awareness among the population of issues related to matters of equality. In the area of international cooperation and development, we have placed particular emphasis on projects aimed at assisting women who live in poverty.

We believe that education and awareness-raising are clearly of the highest importance for the achievement of the goal of full de facto equality. Governments can and must take a leading role in designing the relevant policies, but full equality on a daily basis can ultimately be achieved only through the active involvement of women and men themselves. It is thus very fortunate that the work on the advancement of women in Liechtenstein has always been characterized by fruitful dialogue and close interaction between the governmental side and civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations.

In 1999, the first women's congress in Liechtenstein gathered women from all over the country and resulted in the adoption of a catalogue of proposed further measures for the advancement of women. The Equal Opportunity Award 2000 provided an incentive for the active promotion of equality issues by companies, organizations and individuals.

National implementation of the achievements of Beijing remains our priority goal, and all our efforts in this respect are complementary to the required action on the international level. The Beijing Conference was of significant importance for our domestic efforts in this area, and we have continued our efforts in the framework of international organizations, in particular the United Nations.

Like others, we are disappointed that two important goals in the area of the advancement of women have not been achieved: the fifty-fifty representation of women and men in the United Nations Secretariat, and the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This, however, must not lead to frustration, but rather to stepping up our efforts to achieve these two very important goals as soon as possible. On the positive

side, we have noted with particular satisfaction the adoption of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW last October. This Protocol can prove to be of highest importance for the advancement of women's rights, and we are making every effort to follow up on our signature with early ratification of the Protocol.

Other developments in the area of international law which were of significance to the advancement of women's rights were the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is of utmost importance that, five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, we all reaffirm the results of Beijing and commit ourselves to enhancing our efforts for their full implementation. Beijing was a milestone on the road to full equality of women and men. Five years later, much has been achieved; a lot remains to be done.

The President: I now call on Mrs. Dalia Itzik, Minister of the Environment of the State of Israel.

Mrs. Itzik (Israel): At the outset, let me thank the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Assistant Secretary-General Mrs. Angela King; and the Division for the Advancement of Women in the United Nations for the most comprehensive and important report, presented to us at this special session of the General Assembly.

It is a pleasure and an honour to be here with representatives today. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Dalia Itzik. I am a minister in the Government of Israel and a mother of three. I was born in Jerusalem, and served as Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem in charge of education.

Millions of Christian, Muslim and Jewish believers pray for Jerusalem, the city of King David, Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. I have come here today from Jerusalem to pray for all the women of the world. I have come here today from Jerusalem in the name of mothers from the Middle East and from all over the world. My prayer is that we may put an end to war so that the fruits of our wombs will not be used as live targets for bullets, hand grenades and other deadly weapons.

I have come here today from Jerusalem to pray together with all in this Hall that finally there may be an end to the longest lasting slavery in history, the slavery of women. In many countries around the world, women are still bound as if by chains to fundamentalists of all religions, to chauvinism and to prejudice, all expressions of human ignorance in its darkest forms.

I have come here today from Jerusalem to declare, together with all in this Hall, that we will wage an all-out and uncompromising war on physical violence against women and against the invasion of their bodies by sexual coercion. All humanity must fight against that illness with the same force it has applied, and continues to apply, in its fight against the worst diseases in history: the black plague, cancer and AIDS.

A nation which does not grant full equality to women is only half a nation. A world which does not grant full equality to women is only half a world. Equality is not an issue of women alone. It is a need of all civilization. I believe that women's struggle for equality should be a joint effort, together with men, not instead of men and not against men. Equality means democratic rule. Equality means human progress. Equality means high moral standards.

I know that many delegations, including the Israeli delegation, will tell us of the enlightened and advanced laws existing in their countries regarding the equality of women. The Israeli delegation has in fact brought a report showing the remarkable achievements in Israel in this field. We must not, however, be misled by these declarations. All of us, especially the women here today, know that the problem is not always the lack of proper legislation but rather the lack of a proper social attitude. We know that, despite existing equal opportunity laws, there is still discrimination regarding the employment, advancement, appointment and salary level of women. The equal rights laws do not guarantee that women will be nominated for high positions.

Politicians, women's organizations and women journalists in Israel have set out on a journey for women's rights. That journey is long and hard. In spite of our many achievements, we have covered only the first steps on the long road to equality. However, as a woman, I am optimistic and full of hope. I believe that the twenty-first century will be better for women in Israel. We are on the road to peace with our neighbours. In a future peacetime Israel, the need for women in all walks of life will be greater.

Where past centuries were characterized by the Industrial Revolution, a revolution of might, the

twenty-first century will be characterized by a "brain revolution". Work that requires muscle-power today will be replaced by high-tech industries and knowledge that demand brain-power tomorrow. In the era of the brain revolution, the excuse that men have a physical advantage over women no longer applies.

The woman of the year 2000 in Israel and throughout the world will be more educated, more aware of her power, and more assertive in her demands of the society in which she lives.

On a personal level too, I am optimistic. My mother, Marcel Ballas, was born in Iraq and emigrated to Israel 50 years ago. She was uneducated and raised eight children. I was the sixth. In Iraq, the country from which she came, the concept of equal opportunity did not exist. However, my mother gave us, her sons and her daughters alike, the same attention and the same infinite love. When she used to say "I love you", I knew without a doubt that she was not talking about a computer virus.

When I compare my life with that of my mother, I say, yes, we have come a long way. I hope that when my 15-year-old daughter, Adi, compares her life with mine, she too will say, yes, yes, we have certainly come a long way.

The President: I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister of Human Resource Development of India.

Mr. Joshi (India): Gender equality, development and peace will all be key to the progress of nations in the twenty-first century. It is therefore appropriate that these should be the themes of the first special session of the General Assembly to take place in the new millennium.

India was the first country to adopt the Beijing Platform for Action without reservations, and it is committed to its goals. In India, the year 2001 will be Women's Empowerment Year. Five years down the road from Beijing, as we review progress and define our vision for the twenty-first century, we seek inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, who said, long before it was fashionable to do so,

> "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."

The expression of egocentric individualism is alien to Indian social thought. Through its multiple social units, Indian society strives for harmony, plays down differences and lays emphasis on family values and social responsibilities. We do not accept that one sex is inferior to the other. Both share in equal measure the common humanity on which we base our claims for equal human rights and freedoms.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

No human society is perfect, but in our vision, as embodied in our legislation and policies, if any section of society — women, men, children, caste or class — is denied dignity and respect, these must be restored. It is only the ethos of this internalized and convincing striving for harmony and equality which has enabled our vast society to strengthen democratic norms over five decades at all levels of governance.

We take pride in the fact that we are the world's largest democracy, and that our Constitution not only guarantees equality for women in every sphere of political, economic and social life, but also provides for affirmative action in their favour. In India, we have adopted a two-pronged strategy for the empowerment of women; while mainstreaming gender in all policies and programmes across all sectors, we have concentrated on making women-specific interventions. Literacy rates have increased faster for women than for men. In the crucial area of reproductive health, our Reproductive Child Health Programme adopts a non-prescriptive approach to family planning and encourages greater male participation. In geographical scope, our Integrated Child Development Services Programme is one of the largest outreach programmes in the world, and, with over 1 million village-level workers, it is the largest women's workforce under any one programme, anywhere.

The girl child is a special focus of our social concern. Organizing women's collectives and self-help groups has helped in the economic empowerment of women. Microcredit institutions in rural areas have proved to be particularly successful. The strong partnership established with the women's movement and non-governmental organizations has galvanized social mobilization and action in local communities. The judiciary and media have played important roles. All of this has brought about a perceptible improvement in the position of women in India. We are

fully dedicated to proceeding with determination on the road of women's advancement.

In terms of political empowerment, constitutional amendments have reserved for women one third of the seats in grass-roots democratic institutions at the village and municipal level. Nearly 700,000 women now hold positions as members or chairpersons. To carry this process further, our Government has now introduced another Constitutional Amendment Bill, which seeks to make similar reservations for women in Parliament and in the state legislatures.

Important additions to the interlocking and mutually reinforcing web of institutions and systems we have created to advance the cause of women are the Parliamentary Committee on the Empowerment of Women, set up in 1997, a National Centre for Gender Training and Research and a revitalized Committee on Gender Mainstreaming. We are strengthening our monitoring mechanisms and databases to ensure that the benefits of budgetary allocations for women in all schemes and programmes reach them.

While we, like others in the larger community of democracies, work at the national level to implement what we all accepted as common goals in the Beijing Platform, the international environment has not been as supportive as we had hoped it would be, and there have been developments that have thwarted national efforts. Globalization has been a mixed blessing for women; in some developing countries, it has brought them new economic opportunities, but many feel that their marginalization has been accentuated by globalization. Governments have fewer resources and sometimes less freedom to promote social development, and in several instances, the unchecked power of corporate capital, even over national Governments, has increased disparities within societies. Women are the sector that has been most vulnerable to the social stresses of globalization.

Stopping all forms of violence against women must be the foremost priority for all of us. The fact that this violence persists and takes on new forms should be a matter of both shame and concern for all civilized societies. But in addition, democratic and pluralistic countries have had to face proxy wars and externally sponsored terrorism; women and children are the first targets and preferred victims. The international community must unite to respond to these challenges.

The feminization of poverty and the marginalization of women need urgent remedial attention. The eradication of poverty was the foremost objective of the Platform for Action. It remains unrealized. Instead, we have the emergence of the "new poor" — a new category of poor, who do not inherit poverty but fall into it because of inadequate income, a lack of access to social services and ecological deterioration. Gender bias is still not uncommon in programmes to remove illiteracy and malnutrition. Maternal mortality rates are unacceptably higher in the developing countries. While Governments in developing countries do their best to improve health services for women and to provide medicine at affordable costs, they need greater support from their development partners in the international community.

Today, in the first year of the new millennium, our focus should be on the realization of full freedom for women. From liberation and emancipation to empowerment, the story of the fight for gender equality has been one of a continuing struggle to demolish stereotypes and negative social attitudes, while empowering women economically. At this special session, we need to commit ourselves even more strongly, not only to the full empowerment of women, but to their full empowerment in full freedom.

We believe that, in its ancient traditions, India offers a conceptual understanding for our task. The concept of complementarity, rather than conflict between the sexes, has inspired our thought through the ages and guides our actions to the present day. This intuition of complementarity is illustrated in Indian sculpture and painting by the figure of Ardhanarishvara, who is half male and half female, divided vertically down the centre. Modern scientific research, which has located in the left and right sides of the brain what are commonly described as male and female characteristics, confirms a truth that our ancients divined intuitively. Science and faith both tell us that all of us carry from birth the potential to develop together and to celebrate the masculine and feminine aspects of the human personality. As no man or woman is an island, so, at the deepest level, no individual is purely male or female. Different situations bring out unsuspected qualities or failings in ourselves.

The embodiments of knowledge, prosperity and power of the one supreme being in India's traditions are a feminine trinity: Saraswati, the presiding deity of learning; Lakshmi, the presiding deity of wealth; and

Durga, who personifies strength and power. It is our vision that women in the twenty-first century should be embodiments of knowledge, prosperity and power.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nicole Pery, Secretary of State for Women's Rights and Professional Training of France.

Mrs. Pery (France) (*spoke in French*): It is truly a great pleasure for me to speak to the Assembly today. First, I wish to pay tribute to the role played by the United Nations in combating exclusion and discrimination, particularly as they affect women.

On behalf of the French Government, I assure the Assembly of the full commitment of France to the success of the work of this special session of the General Assembly. We hope that its work will help advance the commitments of the international community to equality between men and women, both *de jure* and de facto.

We fully support the statement made by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union. We are particularly eager to express our support for the declaration adopted in February 2000 in Luxembourg by the Governments of the States members of the International Organization of la Francophonie.

I wish to voice our concern about three areas that shape women's autonomy and integrity. I wish to speak about girls' full access to education, the elimination of violence and the effective guarantee of the right to health.

Education is the prime tool of equality, as well as of individual, collective and sustainable development. Not only must the educational system be accessible to girls at all levels, but schools and classes must really be mixed. However, that is not enough. The actual contents of education and the curricula must be non-sexist. As Secretary of State for the rights of women, I recently signed a convention with the Ministry of Education that is along those lines.

Combating violence against women is the cornerstone in the struggle for equality. It is by naming this violence and condemning it that the reality of it will cease to be denied. Peace and cohesion become fragile when a society silently acquiesces in violence, be it public or private, between a couple, where sexual violence and rape are not denounced or punished.

There is one kind of violence to which I wish to refer emphatically, because it is bred of poverty and exclusion; this is trafficking in women and prostitution. Human beings are not like merchandise that can be bought and sold. This runs counter to the spirit and the letter of the United Nations Convention of 1949, to which we reiterate our commitment. The negotiations going on in Vienna on the Protocol on the trafficking in human persons, additional to the United Nations Convention against Organized Transnational Crime, must preserve this spirit.

Women's right to health is the third pillar of their autonomy. This is impossible without recognizing fundamental rights in the matter of sexuality and procreation. Free contraception and legalized abortion, accompanied by medical follow-up, are also policies of prevention and early warning that are essential in the area of public health. The rights strengthen the effectiveness of the fight against AIDS, which must continue to mobilize the financial solidarity of the international community. France reiterates its commitments here, as well as its proposal to hold a conference under United Nations auspices, of pharmaceutical companies, donor countries and developing countries, to achieve low-cost access to medical drugs for sick people.

Achieving equal access for women and men to decision-making is a way to achieve full equality. Just a few years ago in my country, this idea was an idea that was known and defended only by men and women committed to feminism. A law on political parity was finally just adopted on 3 May by our Parliament, and it will be implemented during the 2001 municipal elections. Implementation of this law will very soon bring about a feminization of elected assemblies, both local and national. We owe this result to the women's movements, as well as to the determination of the Prime Minister and to the agreement given by the President of the Republic. I am convinced that the balanced participation of women in political decision-making will bring about a renewal in our political life. Power-sharing will trigger other changes in the economic, social and cultural life of our country.

Before I conclude, I wish to mention briefly the most recent international instruments for equality; and here I refer to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the approval procedure of which is to lead to completion in the next few days in France.

Gender equality concerns all countries of the world, the whole of humanity. The priorities laid down in Beijing must today not merely be reaffirmed, but also, if possible, be supplemented, so that we can go beyond them to deal with the new challenges that confront us. We know that equality will determine development and peace.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Rimantas Kairelis, Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania.

Mr. Kairelis (Lithuania): We come together at this special session not only to reaffirm our commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action but also to pledge to undertake further actions so as to ensure that words become deeds. Although the word "mainstreaming" had at first been only a clumsy structure causing problems for translators and interpreters of quite a few languages, it is now a well-defined concept demanding its use not only in United Nations resolutions but also in governmental programmes. We realize that the human rights of women and girls are an inalienable and integral part of universal human rights. Therefore, we welcome the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, establishing a right-to-petition procedure.

The fact that so many international and national non-governmental organizations are participating at this special session proves that the partnership between Governments and non-governmental organizations is as important as ever. We should recognize the contribution of civil society, which, in many cases, has been an equal partner to the Governments in promoting the human rights of women.

When it comes to naming the concrete results achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Government of Lithuania is glad to report on progress made and to single out the main achievements. During the five-year period since the Fourth World Conference on Women, which represented a new watershed in the movement for securing equality, development and peace for all women in the world, a legal basis has been created, and a strong institutional mechanism has been established for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Lithuania. The Lithuanian Parliament passed the Law on Equal Opportunities, the first such law in Central and Eastern Europe; it subsequently established a mechanism supervising its implementation — the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman and the Office of Equal Opportunities.

Governmental policies, important preventive programmes and projects tackling poverty and unemployment issues, addressing the situation of families and vulnerable groups, including single mothers with children, as well as women in the rural areas, have been developed. As one of the consequences, the unemployment rate of women in Lithuania became rather low compared to that of men. However, such areas as equal pay for work of equal value, women's involvement in public initiatives, participation in governmental structures, leadership in professional careers and businesses and family relations based on the principle of equality and partnership are the main areas of concern for the Government and society, as a major condition and indicator for mature communities in the valuable development of humanity. We will be glad to report on progress in the future.

To implement a constructive policy, Governments have to engage in real partnership and alliances with non-governmental organizations. The Baltic conference "Beijing +5: challenges and perspectives" has proved that statements calling for collaboration and dialogue between decision-making spheres and movements within civil society are no longer just theoretical frameworks. For three days, the House of the Lithuanian Government looked as the United Nations building does today. Constructive debates among the non-governmental organizations and governmental representatives took place, setting benchmarks, indicators, deadlines and monitoring processes.

Reaffirming our strong commitment to the future implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania is starting to draw up the second national action plan, which will encompass the new guidelines established at this special session. Preparations for the Reykjavik follow-up conference, which will take place in Lithuania in June 2001, are already under way. The conference will formulate further actions and strategies so as to accelerate full implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. To achieve this purpose, follow-up projects, with the cooperation of Governments, non-governmental

organizations and private enterprises, are expected to be initiated at the conference.

In conclusion, since the Beijing Conference Lithuania has made progress involving more women in decision-making processes and promoting gender mainstreaming. However, many issues remain to be addressed in the future so as to create real possibilities for women to enjoy fully the benefits of knowledge, labour and economic independence. I shall conclude by proposing: Let us make the world in the second millennium a real motherland for all peoples, regardless of their race, gender, cultural or religious beliefs.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Norica Nicolai, Secretary of State and Minister of Labour of Romania.

Mrs. Nicolai (Romania): It is a great honour for me to take the floor today as the representative of my country to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled, in such a challenging way for us all, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement delivered this morning by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Five years ago, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a comprehensive, action-oriented global strategy for the realization of the human rights of women as an integral part of universal human rights, for the equal participation of women in all fields of social life and for the elimination of discrimination based on gender. This international agenda for women has had a great impact on the policies of Governments, international organizations and civil society all over the world, in terms of thinking and putting into practice new strategies and solutions for the full achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women. A new awareness has arisen that sustainable development cannot be achieved without democracy, the promotion and protection of all human rights, gender balance and the participation of women, as equal partners, in all spheres of life.

In many countries of the world, the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was understood as an integral part of the overall democratization process, which created new opportunities for women's equal participation and for their enjoyment of their human rights.

However, many of the ambitious goals set five years ago in Beijing have yet to be achieved. We are gathering for the next few days in New York to reaffirm the full validity of the Beijing Platform, to give new impetus to relevant national and international efforts and to adopt, through the outcome document of the special session, further measures for the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action.

The Fourth World Conference on Women has made an essential contribution to the development of Romanian policies on the promotion of the human rights of women and the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities for men and women. Specific institutional and legislative steps have been made following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A national machinery aimed at promoting equal opportunities for men and women was established in October 1995 in the framework of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and is meant to address the main challenges pertaining to the situation of women in Romania: ensuring de facto respect for the principle of non-discriminatory access of women to the labour market; improving their working conditions; improving the legal framework relevant to the enjoyment of women's human rights; and monitoring the implementation of this legislation.

The national institutional framework was gradually developed to involve a wide range of responsible actors: the Subcommittee for Equal Opportunities of the Parliament of Romania, with the participation of parliamentarians from all the political parties represented in Parliament; the Department for the Protection of Children, Women and Family of the institution of the Romanian Ombudsman; and the Commission on Equal Opportunities of the Economic and Social Council, which brings the issues of gender equality into the agenda of the tripartite consultations among the social dialogue partners.

Improved coordination and coherence between all those public authorities responsible for women's issues are still needed for the successful implementation of policies and measures in the field of equal opportunities. In this respect, a recent governmental decision established an Inter-ministerial Consultative

Commission on Equal Opportunities, which is expected substantively to contribute to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all sectoral policies and programmes.

Among recent legislative measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities and an equal sharing of responsibilities within the family, as well as supporting the conciliation of family with professional life, I would like to mention the draft law on equal opportunities and the law on paternal leave.

Let me now turn briefly to an area of concern to all of us — the phenomenon of domestic violence, which, due to its reduced visibility, is still very difficult to prevent, alleviate and control. Steps have been made in this direction, especially through the establishment, in close partnership with non-governmental organizations, of a pilot centre for assistance to victims of family violence. Amendments have also been proposed to the Criminal Code. Increased cooperation at the national and international levels is also required in order to prevent and combat such phenomena as forced prostitution and the trafficking of women and girls.

We are highly encouraged by the increased role of Romanian non-governmental organizations in raising awareness about women's issues, especially in the fields of civil and political rights, economic participation, the development of business opportunities, health and family planning. Their dynamic and innovative spirit gives us confidence in the future of the dialogue and partnership between government and civil society.

An evaluation of progress in my country in the field of the advancement of women shows a particular increase in the contribution of women to such different sectors as health, education, culture, justice and new technologies. At the same time, we must not forget that women are also most affected by economic hardship, reduction in social security, unemployment — be it their own or their family members' — or by different forms of violence. Measures are still needed to stimulate and support the political participation of women in order to ensure a greater presence of women in power and decision-making, with positive influence upon reforms designed to benefit them.

Without an active and direct involvement of women in democratic processes, development and peace, the objectives of the Platform for Action will remain mere aspirations.

We have to join our efforts to build societies based on equality, the full participation of women and men, tolerance and respect for women's human rights.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Romania's commitment to continue its efforts to overcome obstacles and undertake further actions for the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Last but not least, I wish to recall an idea that was put forward by André Malraux — that if the next millennium is not one of democracy for women and men, it will be a millennium in danger.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Concepción Dancausa Treviño, Secretary-General for Social Affairs of Spain.

Mrs. Dancausa Treviño (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address this special session, whose importance and momentous nature affect not only women but society as a whole.

Five years have elapsed since the Fourth World Conference on Women. I am particularly gratified, on behalf of my Government and in keeping with the guidelines of the European Union, to be able to briefly reflect on the most significant advances that have been achieved in my country since 1995.

Spain has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for men and women, and to this end it has adopted various programmes at the national and local levels and that of the autonomous regions, in keeping with our country's territorial organization.

Plan III, approved by the Spanish Government in March 1997, is presently in force. This plan incorporates the commitments undertaken in Beijing to promote specific programmes aimed at helping women while mainstreaming the principle of equal opportunity in public policy.

Over the past five years, we have strengthened our institutional machinery and increased our budgets and human resources in order to implement the activities and measures provided for in the Platform. These activities are being carried out in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, social actors, the various autonomous regions, local entities and ministerial departments.

Spain to date has made significant progress. In the area of education, 53 per cent of those enrolled in

Spanish universities are women. However, there are still shortcomings. For instance, only 26 per cent of those employed in technical jobs are women. We have a generation of highly educated women, but this is not enough. Achieving autonomy for women requires not only that they be educated but also that they participate in the working world.

In the context of the European Union's employment policies, legislative reform has been directed at resolving problems related to women's unemployment, their vertical and horizontal segregation, the short-term nature of their contracts and the difficulties they face in attempting to juggle family and work. Many measures have been taken. These include the 1997 agreements concerning the employment of social actors and specific measures aimed at promoting increased and better employment.

All of these measures have yielded significant progress in the area of women's contribution to the workforce. Women's participation rate rose from 36 per cent in 1995 to 38 per cent in 1999, increasing their employment rate to 30 per cent from 25 per cent and decreasing the overall unemployment rate to 23 per cent from 30 per cent.

Statistics confirm that clear progress has been made, though difficulties remain. Women must be given improved access to positions of power and decision-making, since despite their increased participation imbalances continue to exist at the qualitative and quantitative levels in all social sectors.

In the political realm, as a result of the recent elections, held last March, women now hold 28 per cent of the seats in Congress, 26 per cent in the Senate, and 29 per cent in the autonomous Parliaments. They also constitute 34 per cent of the Spanish representation in the European Parliament, which is higher than the average of 30 per cent. But this participation must increase. There are still too few high-level women in the business world.

Violence against women has been given particular attention by the Spanish Government. To this end, a plan of action was adopted for 1998-2000 which includes a series of measures and a budget of $70 million.

Today in my country there are specific police and security units charged with assisting women who have been victimized. There are also victim assistance centres in the court system and special centres to help, rehabilitate and follow up on women who have been victims of violence.

Much work has been done in the area of raising the awareness of health care, legal and educational professionals. Legislative reform has also been enacted to improve the protection available to victims, prevent the impunity of perpetrators and accelerate judicial proceedings.

But this is not enough. Spain is prepared in the years to come to support the various activities being carried out at the international level to eradicate domestic violence and to take the necessary measures at the national level. We consider unacceptable the violence that is suffered by the majority women throughout the world.

In the realm of international law, Spain has been supporting the work of the United Nations to promote equality. In March of this year, Spain signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and is currently working on its ratification. In June 1999, Spain submitted reports III and IV to the CEDAW Committee.

Nonetheless, despite all of these efforts, we cannot say that in my country women enjoy the same rights as men. Rural women, older women, migrants and disabled women need special attention and care. Furthermore, the potential of women to contribute to the environment, to the exercise of human rights, to non-violence and to the economy not only must not be forgotten; it must be fully recognized.

The present universal recognition of equal opportunity in a globalized society requires joint action and efforts on the part of developed and developing countries alike so that, overcoming our differences, we can forge a twenty-first century in which society is more equitable and more in harmony with reality.

To this end, the commitment of Governments, institutions, non-governmental organizations and social agencies is required, because we must guarantee equality for all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Effi Bekou-Balta, Secretary-General for Gender Equality of Greece.

Mrs. Bekou-Balta (Greece): It is a great honour for me to take the floor at this special session of the General Assembly on women in the twenty-first century. I wish to assure the Assembly of my delegation's full support and cooperation for the successful conclusion of this important meeting.

My delegation fully subscribes to the statement made by the Minister for Equality of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

We are here today to reaffirm our Government's commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Furthermore, we, like so many other delegations, also came here not merely wishing to contribute to the review and appraisal of progress in the implementation of the Platform and identify new challenges and trends; more importantly, we gathered here to agree upon further actions and initiatives and to ensure that further commitments for gender equality, development and peace are made and implemented.

Twenty-five years after the First United Nations World Conference on Women, in Mexico City, there has been considerable progress made towards achieving equality between women and men. During the past century, constant efforts and a lot of hard work led to changes which contributed to the strengthening of democracy, social justice and respect for human rights. Under the influence primarily of the women's movement, Governments were induced or persuaded to adopt specific measures to their benefit.

Five years after the Beijing Conference, although women's rights have eventually been recognized as full human rights, inequalities between women and men still persist and a series of obstacles still prevent the attainment of full equality.

In the new globalized international context, social developments and new technologies create new inequalities which coexist with older ones, in areas such as poverty, unemployment, immigration, violence and exploitation of women and children, inequality in the workplace, salaries, social security, women's participation in decision-making and others.

Turning specifically to my country, Greece, let me highlight areas to which priority has been given and in which outstanding progress has been made. Greece, as a member State of the European Union and a founding Member of the United Nations and other international organizations, supports the full implementation of declarations and international conventions for human rights and the full participation of women in economic, political, social and cultural life at both national and international levels. Since 1982 the Greek Government has adopted a powerful and progressive legal and institutional framework aimed at eradicating all forms of discrimination against women.

In 1983 Greece signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and on 10 December 1999 Greece was one of the first 23 countries to sign the Optional Protocol to that Convention.

Nowadays, protecting women's rights and guaranteeing equal opportunities and the attainment of substantial equality, above and beyond legislative measures, constitute top priorities for the Greek Government, and especially for our Prime Minister, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration.

The 1999 and 2000 National Action Plan for Employment endorsed the proposals of the General Secretariat for Equality aimed at the equal representation of women and men in all employment areas of the public and private sectors.

For the period 2000-2006, the Ministry of Education in Greece has adopted specific measures. Among the various actions undertaken were, *inter alia*, the establishment of all-day kindergartens, day-care stations and programmes within elementary schools.

A number of measures have also been implemented to combat social exclusion, especially for women belonging to religious minorities, refugees, single mothers and inhabitants of remote and rural areas.

In addition, we have established an inter-ministerial committee on violence against women, with the participation of experts and women's organizations, aimed at studying the existing structures for support of the victims and at implementing specific actions for the elimination of the phenomenon.

In each of the 13 regions of the country, equality centres have been in full operation since last year.

In the national parliamentary elections of April 2000, there was an increase in the percentage of

women elected to the Greek Government, from 6 per cent to 10 per cent of the total. The Greek Government is now working on a new legal framework for the equal participation of women and men in decision-making in public administration bodies, as well as in regional and local authorities and councils.

Greece, due to its special geographic and historical position in south-eastern Europe, has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the principle of equality within the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

In June 2000, Greece, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, will organize an international seminar on trafficking in and sexual exploitation of women and girls from Central and Eastern Europe.

It is absolutely imperative that the principles of Beijing be safeguarded, that our firm commitment to them be renewed and that particular emphasis be placed on implementation of the Platform for Action. At the same time, in view of the formidable challenges which confront humanity in the new millennium, it is also essential to attain these goals in a spirit of constructive cooperation and of mutual respect for and understanding of each one's specific needs and interests.

In this very spirit, it is our fervent wish and hope that the final documents of this milestone event will be the product of general agreement and that they will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President: I call on Mrs. Galina Karelova, Vice-Minister of Labour and Social Development of the Russian Federation.

Mrs. Karelova (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This session taking place in New York is not just another special session of the General Assembly, but a truly global international forum whose decisions will determine to a large extent the social development strategy of the twenty-first century. By discussing the role and place of women in today's world and their contribution to the political and economic life of the world, to the creation of civil society and to the deepening of democratic processes, we are discussing the future of human civilization.

It is impossible to resolve the most burning issues of the day without the participation of women. Their intellectual and spiritual potential are an invaluable resource for enhancing social development. The historic mission of the United Nations is to help women of the world become the artisans of their own fate. We commend the efforts that this Organization is making to eliminate gender discrimination and to enhance the social and economic status of women. Russia has advocated and will continue to advocate enhancing the role and authority of the United Nations in the twenty-first century, as we view it as a unique mechanism for establishing intergovernmental dialogue and for facilitating international relations.

Today our job is to assess the progress made in the five years since the Beijing Conference.

Unfortunately, I am obliged to say that the global processes now under way do not facilitate the achievement of the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, but make it even more difficult. Appalling modern-day realities, such as international terrorism and organized crime, militant separatism and inter-ethnic hostility and illicit trafficking in arms and drugs, directly affect the lives of millions of women in various parts of the world.

Other global problems too place an additional burden upon women. These include the widening economic gap between the world's richest and poorest nations, the deteriorating environment and the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and other highly dangerous infections. There has been no decline in the number of women and children who fall victim to armed conflict.

There is no doubt that conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes require appropriate and sometimes decisive responses from the international community. But I stress that the notion of so-called humanitarian intervention can in no way be used to flout basic principles of international law, such as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. Russia will consistently oppose "armed humanitarianism" and will promote the creation of a multi-polar world architecture in which all countries and nations can live without fear of discrimination, coercion or political blackmail.

Women in Central and Eastern Europe and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have played a most positive role in bringing about market reform and in creating democratic institutions. I am pleased that the special problems of countries with economies in transition are duly reflected in the draft outcome document of the special session.

Russia itself has been experiencing the whole range of problems associated with the transition process. The Russian Government has begun work on a long-term nationwide development strategy for overcoming the effects of the protracted crisis. The focus of the strategy is not on reform per se, but on the people for whom the reform is being carried out.

Recently we have significantly enhanced the effectiveness of our social policy by making it more targeted. There were tangible improvements in 1999: wages in the public sector increased by 50 per cent; scholarships were doubled; pensions were indexed on a permanent basis and now almost equal the minimum standard of living. All these measures directly affect the status of Russian women, who form a majority of the population.

The decisions taken at the Beijing Conference gave Russia a strong impetus to strengthen our institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and to search for new ways to achieve gender equality. Our gains include the expansion of women's representation in local administrations, an increased number of women participating in legislative elections, increased interaction between State structures and non-governmental women's organizations, and new employment opportunities for women, including in the business sector.

Nevertheless, we cannot hide the fact that there are difficulties in the way of achieving genuine equality. Russian women, like those throughout the world, continue to confront such problems as gender discrimination, poverty, unemployment and inadequate representation in administrative posts.

We have given a detailed and frank description of our achievements and our shortcomings in the Russian Federation's national report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which has been circulated at this session.

Life in Russia is changing very quickly. We now have a newly elected, young and energetic President, a newly elected lower chamber of Parliament and a newly appointed cabinet of ministers. Women are pinning great hopes on these changes. Just a few days ago the State Duma held parliamentary hearings on equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women, and the Government held a third all-Russia conference on the status of women. Discussion at these forums showed that women remain the most active group in Russian society and that they make an enormous contribution to the political and economic life of our country.

This special session will undoubtedly provide considerable input for addressing the global challenges facing us, and will bring together all the world's women. Only by working together can we respond to the challenges of our time. Only with mutual support can we attain the lofty goal of making the twenty-first century a century of gender equality, social partnership and creative labour.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, Chairperson of the delegation of Ghana.

Mrs. Rawlings (Ghana): I bring to all participants in this special session and to all supporters of the crusade for the empowerment of women the warmest greetings and best wishes of the President, the Government and the people of Ghana, as well as those of the teeming masses of women who walk miles to fetch drinking water and who are struggling daily to feed, house and educate their children.

It is indeed a privilege for me to be here to give a voice to the voiceless. The majority of underprivileged women in Ghana, whose interests I represent here, may be unaware that this session of the General Assembly is even taking place. But it is their social, economic and political welfare that form the core theme of this session.

At the start of this new millennium, it is indeed appropriate that we should gather here to review and evaluate the Beijing Conference, because few issues are more urgent than the empowerment of women; few measures can have such a far-reaching positive impact than giving women better access to education, basic health care and financial resources.

The ones whose lives should be made better by the decisions we take at this gathering are the poor women in the villages and the slums of Africa and of developing countries everywhere, who walk vast distances to find wood for cooking, who toil for hours in the fields under the hot sun. These are the ones whose empowerment should be the focus of our attention and of our endeavours.

The Beijing Conference was a major landmark in the continuing struggle for women's empowerment. It brought issues of gender equality to the centre of the

global agenda and highlighted 12 critical areas of concern, among others. Since the Beijing Conference, much has been achieved at all levels in moving forward the agenda of gender equality. Today, throughout the international community, there is a new level of awareness of gender issues; there is a degree of intensified mobilization in support of women's empowerment; and there is a renewed momentum to end institutionalized discrimination against women — a momentum which was absent before the Beijing Conference.

Five years on, as we meet here today in this special session, the consensus is not to renegotiate the text of Beijing — that is not what we are about — but to take stock and provide a critical overview of follow-up activities in the implementation of the agreed decisions.

The theme for this session is especially timely in the light of the tragic conflicts and unrest in so many parts of the world, and especially in Africa today. In the Sudan, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, the wars continue to rage, and vast numbers of innocent women and children are subjected to unbearable hardships as a direct consequence of these wars.

Thanks to our collective efforts, it is acknowledged today, more than ever before, that the empowerment of women has ceased to be an academic debate. The world now recognizes that promoting the welfare of women enhances the integrity and dignity of all humanity. In several parts of the world, the understanding has emerged that genuine and determined efforts to make women equal participants in economic and political life are ongoing. But our mission transcends the quest for social justice. Empowering women is an essential precondition for liberating society itself from many of its self-inflicted miseries. Society itself must therefore be encouraged to exercise its collective power to those ends. I think we should be justifiably proud of how far we have come, while remaining always on our guard — we must be on our guard — so that our hard-won gains are not eroded.

Allow me now to tell the Assembly about our own efforts in Ghana in the wake of the Beijing Conference. Whatever progress we have achieved in Ghana on women's issues must be seen in the context of the broader, far-reaching political, social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place. For the first time, the ordinary men and women of Ghana have had their self-confidence restored and have recovered their belief in their capacity to manage their affairs. Through structures at the local and district levels, people are directly involved in making the critical choices that affect their daily lives. It is in this context that various laws have been adopted ensuring that the property rights, economic and social rights and cultural rights of women have been adequately protected.

We are doing our best to grapple with the moral imperatives of the Beijing Platform for Action. Certainly, we cherish our cultural heritage and the centuries-old traditions from which our society derives its identity, and perhaps its resilience. But we also acknowledge that practices that undermine human dignity, retard social progress and bring about unnecessary misery and suffering must not be countenanced by any society that appreciates the worth of its people.

Laws have therefore been passed to criminalize harmful socio-economic and sociocultural practices, such as female genital mutilation and ritual servitude, including the Trokosi system, whereby females are kept in virtual slavery for crimes purported to have been committed by their families. Penalties for rape and defilement have become stiffer. The legal minimum age for marriage has been increased from 14 to 18 years for both boys and girls. To see to it that women have effective and prompt justice, a Women and Juveniles Unit has been set up in the police force to handle cases of abuse of the rights of women and children.

All of these efforts have been complemented by sustained public education on female reproductive health and birth control. In addition, special attention is being given to the enrolment of the girl child in school.

The importance of small-scale industry and cooperatives in improving the income-earning capacity of urban and rural poor women has not been overlooked at all. To address the critical issue of poverty, the Government of Ghana, with the support of the donor community, has developed a national poverty reduction programme that is being implemented by both the public sector and non-governmental organizations. For our women, this programme offers credit facilities and entrepreneurial training. In addition, 30 per cent of the local-government common

fund is used to support the economic activities of women.

Under our health-sector-wide approach, free medical care for pregnant women, children under the age of 5 and people over the age of 70 years is guaranteed. These programmes have had measurable results: from 1993 to 1998, infant mortality decreased from 66 to 56.7 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy for females increased from 58 years in 1993 to 61 years in 1998. The Government of Ghana is also vigorously pursuing the establishment of a health insurance scheme.

The result of our modest efforts is becoming increasingly visible in the number of active female participants in public life and politics, generally. Undeniably, the presence of women in our Parliament and in the Government has greatly enriched Ghanaian politics.

Whichever way we look at it, gender equality, peace and development should define both our individual and our collective roles in the twenty-first century. Our failures and humiliations, as well as our triumphs in the last century, demand nothing less of us.

Despite all of the achievements that I have outlined, Ghana faces new and formidable challenges in pushing forward the agenda for the advancement of women. Structural adjustment, privatization, trade liberalization and globalization have had and continue to have a negative impact on women and children. Our transition to a market economy has affected women's access to employment, health, education and other social services. The recent increase in the price of crude oil and the sharp fall in the price of cocoa and gold — our primary export commodities — have had adverse effects on our fragile economic recovery, resulting in the increasing feminization of poverty, particularly among female-headed households.

The Beijing meeting gave us an important launching pad for reaching greater heights. I have endeavoured to outline some of the measures that have been implemented by Ghana, with the support of United Nations agencies and many other countries, in furtherance of the objectives of the Platform for Action.

It can be seen that our follow-up efforts have been multifaceted, involving action at the international, national and grass-roots levels, as well as the public and private sectors. The cornerstone of our programme essentially remains poverty reduction, credit facilities, coupled with entrepreneurship training for women, access to free medical care for pregnant women, the free compulsory universal basic education programme and a host of other efforts that I will not bore you with today.

Whatever our shortcomings have been over the past five years, it should be understood that the Platform for Action is a global initiative aimed at realizing shared objectives and consolidating the shared values without which our vision for the twenty-first century will elude us. If we are to succeed, then we need each other — rich and poor countries alike — as common citizens of this truly global village.

In conclusion, five years after Beijing, the progress made in empowering Ghanaian women can be seen as a glass half-full or a glass half-empty. However, I would choose to emphasize the half-full aspect and pay tribute to the important role that civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, has played in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is my hope, and the hope of my delegation, that during this special session the international community will recommit itself to the agreements we reached in Beijing by providing adequate resources for the effective implementation of the Platform.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.